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**To:** JudTestimony  
**Subject:** Testimony on firearms legislation

Bipartisan Commonsense Gun Regulation:  
An Agenda for the Future

The Connecticut legislature is considering a number of new statutes dealing with firearms. Representatives on both sides of the political aisle have proposed bills to deal with guns and the legislature has a rare opportunity to seek out a bi-partisan consensus that could provide a new model for how to move forward in this contentious area. Although public policy research on firearms and violence has been starved of funding for more than a decade, there has been some significant research that provides an opportunity to create a data-driven approach to gun policy. Rather than become distracted by ideological rants that generate more heat, than light, Connecticut, can lead the way in developing a regulatory model that respects the rights of gun owners and makes everyone safer.

As long there have been guns in America there has been regulation. Safe storage laws date back to the colonial era. In the decades after the adoption of the Second Amendment gun regulation intensified. It is easy to forget that one goal of the Second Amendment is the "security of a free state." The Founders understood the dangers of anarchy as much as they feared the threat of tyranny. The Second Amendment does not create a barrier to regulation, it requires it.

The choice Americans face is not between no more guns or no more laws, but the real question is what laws will likely increase the safety of all Americans. The time has come to move beyond simplistic arguments that can fit on a bumper sticker. Guns no more cause violence than they preserve our freedom. Both of these slogans are little more than ideological claims masquerading as public policy agendas. Guns are objects without agency; only humans have the will necessary to transform the lethal potential of firearms into death and misery or sport and protection. Slogans attributing agency to objects only obscure the obvious fact that guns are tools, extremely effective and reliable ones, but tools nonetheless. Conceding this point should not obscure the irrefutable lethality effect of guns. Guns increase the lethality of violent encounters and make impulsive behaviors far more deadly. Sensible gun laws should aim to reward responsible gun owners, restrict access to individuals who should not have deadly weapons, and use the laws of supply and demand to drive up the cost of acquiring illegal guns in the black market.

The current slate of bills before the Connecticut legislature includes proposals from Democrats and Republicans that can help reduce gun violence. There are also bills being considered that simply recycle the old worn out ideological politics of the past. Legislators should embrace the former, and reject the latter. A number of studies have demonstrated conclusively that removing firearms from high risk situations saves lives. The subject of suicide is complex, but the evidence is irrefutable. The availability of firearms increases the likelihood that an attempted suicide will succeed. The Israeli Defense Forces, one of the most effective military forces in the world, has learned this lesson. When faced with an alarmingly high rate of suicide, the IDF changed its policy to restrict the ability of soldiers to take their weapons home with them when off base. This simple change in policy helped to reduce suicide rates by 40%. Removing guns from scenes of

domestic violence will also reduce gun violence. An abused woman is five times as likely to be killed if their abuser owns a firearm. Sensible laws and policies do save lives.

Guns safes and safe storage laws make everyone safer. Legislators ought to not only encourage safe gun ownership and use; they ought to reward such practices with tax incentives. Requiring more rigorous training for gun owners will also make everyone safer. The armed forces provide some of the best and most rigorous training in firearms use and it makes little sense to require veterans who have qualified in the military to pass civilian tests. In fact we should take a cue from the armed forces and raise the mandatory training requirements for obtaining a firearm and tighten requirements for carrying a firearm in public. The current permit schemes in most parts of America, including Connecticut, are a joke. Consider this disturbing fact: studies of firearms use by trained police officers demonstrate that most police fail to hit their targets at close range during life and death situations. Contrary to the NRA's slogan, if you give a good guy a gun, in most cases you get a person who will not hit their target in a real life situation 75% of the time. Is anyone really made safer by allowing individuals without adequate training to carry firearms into populous areas and giving them the ability to attempt to do what most trained cops fail at?

Connecticut has some of the strongest gun laws in the nation and we also have some of the lowest levels of gun violence. What possible justification exists for weakening gun laws that have clearly made Connecticut one of the safest states in the nation? The mix of bills before the Connecticut legislature provides a rare opportunity to chart a new path in this bitter debate, one that is neither anti-gun nor anti-regulation. This is the only sensible path forward.

Respectfully submitted,

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